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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1730
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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1293
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1720
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4137
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1490
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 2154
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0785
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RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1881
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK//DOOC/ECMO/CC/DAO/DOB/DOI//
RUEPGBA/CDR USEUCOM INTEL VAIHINGEN GE//ECJ23-CH/ECJ5M//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000671

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#) [ASEC](#)
SUBJECT: POLICE DETAIN AND BEAT HUNDREDS OF PROTESTORS

REF: HARARE 00195

HARARE 00000671 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Poloff Scott Higgins under Section 1.4 d

SUMMARY

1. (U) Police severely beat hundreds of demonstrators detained on July 25 after protests calling for a new constitution were held in five major cities throughout the country. The protests, organized by National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), followed the opening of Parliament. In Harare, more than 100 police and ZANU-PF youth took turns beating over 240 detainees for close to five hours before releasing them without charge. About 40 have been hospitalized with severe injuries, including broken bones and head wounds; another 200 are awaiting medical examinations. NCA Chairman Lovemore Mahduku described the incident as worse than the events of March 11. There were also reports of arrests and beatings at the other NCA demonstrations. Post recommends the Department issue a statement condemning the Zimbabwean government's actions (see proposed text in paragraph 7). End Summary.

Demand for Change Met with Blows

2. (U) Against the pomp and circumstance surrounding the

opening of Parliament on July 25, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) launched simultaneous protests in Harare, Mutare, Bulawayo, Masvingo, and Gweru calling for a new constitution -- a demand President Mugabe has repeatedly rejected. In Harare, not long after the president finished his address to the gathering of parliamentarians and other dignitaries in which he called for quick passage of Constitutional Amendment 18 which would further expand his ruling party's dominant control over the legislative body, police quickly moved with batons to disperse a crowd of 400 NCA demonstrators marching toward the parliament building.

13. (U) The demonstrators peacefully dispersed; most then regrouped at NCA offices to arrange for transportation home. At about 6 PM a large contingent of police officers forcibly entered the premises and at gun point directed over 240 NCA staff and demonstrators, including elderly women and mothers with their children, on to waiting transportation. NCA Chairman Lovemore Mahduku was not at the offices at the time. Police took the group to Harare Central Police Station where they were made to lie face down in rows in a large open area. More than 100 uniformed police and plain-clothes officials then took turns kicking and beating the detainees for close to five hours before finally releasing them without charge at around 11 PM. Mahduku described the incident as worse than the events of March 11 (reftel).

14. (U) According to Mahduku, crowds of about 150 to 200 also marched in Bulawayo, Masvingo, Mutare, and Gweru. Police reportedly arrested 15 in Mutare, 12 in Masvingo, 10 in Bulawayo, and 6 in Gweru. There were reports of beatings and injuries in Mutare and Masvingo, but details are still unconfirmed.

HARARE 00000671 002.2 OF 003

NGO Offices Resemble Trauma Center

15. (U) On the morning of July 26, the Charge, USAID Mission Director and poloff visited the offices of Counseling Services Unit (CSU), a local NGO that provides medical and psychological services to victims of state violence, to speak with some of the injured. In a scene that resembled a trauma center after a mass casualty incident, we saw scores of injured standing in hallways and lying on the floor in conference rooms wearing bandages and nursing wounds. CSU staff told us that about 200 injured were at their offices and close to 40 others were already hospitalized for serious injuries, including broken bones and head wounds. More injured continued to arrive while we were at CSU. Everyone we spoke with reported painful bruising on their backs and buttocks; many had head injuries and badly swollen arms and hands as a result of trying to defend themselves from blows. They also told us that those who tried to defend themselves received an even worse beating.

16. (U) Several victims said they believed that about 80 percent of the more than 100 officials who participated in the beatings at Harare Central were actually ZANU-PF youth. They described lying on the floor while about 10 assailants at a time beat them with batons and iron bars, kicked them with boots, and occasionally made them sing ZANU-PF songs. A few of the elderly women we spoke with also said that when they were being beaten the assailants would say "you are as old as Mugabe, why do you work with the enemy against your country, you should remember the liberation war." They also said that many of the assailants complained they were tired after delivering a few rounds of beatings. One victim told us that he believed they were finally let go because their tormentors were worn out.

Proposed Statement

17. (SBU) Embassy recommends that Washington issue a statement condemning the detention and beating of citizens participating in a peaceful demonstration. Proposed text follows:

"On July 25 the Government of Zimbabwe brutally beat over 200 of its citizens who were peacefully demonstrating for a new constitution at the opening of a new session of Parliament. The United States deplores the Government of Zimbabwe's continued attacks on civil society and the political opposition in an effort to suppress any criticism in advance of elections planned for next year. This latest action calls into question the Government of Zimbabwe's commitment to ongoing SADC talks meant to establish conditions for free and fair elections.

We call on President Mugabe and the Government of Zimbabwe to respect the rights of all Zimbabweans to participate in the democratic process and guarantee the safety and well-being of its citizens."

Comment

HARARE 00000671 003 OF 003

18. (C) Although in recent weeks the GOZ has permitted MDC rallies and has released a number of detained MDC officials, its response to the NCA marches appears to be a clear signal that it will not permit any demonstrations that challenge its policies or authority. Coming in the midst of the SADC-Mbeki mediation efforts, the GOZ apparently remains unconcerned about international opinion in general, and does not fear that its SADC neighbors will challenge its continuing repressive and brutal actions. End Comment.
DHANANI